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SUBJECT: DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE DENNIS BLAIR'S  
MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CALDERON, OCTOBER 19

Classified By: Ambassador Carlos Pascual.  
Reason: 1.4 (b),(d).

¶1. (S/NF) Summary. DNI Dennis Blair met with President Calderon for about forty minutes at the Presidential Palace on October 19. The bulk of the discussion focused on cooperation on intelligence sharing and the integration of operations by Mexican intelligence and law enforcement authorities. Calderon also commented extensively on political developments in Latin American and the role of the United States. While he said the United States had regained significant stature in Latin America, he also urged greater U.S. involvement in the politics of the region. Several upcoming elections will be critical in shaping the region's political course. The U.S., he said, needs to be seen as a critical player. End Summary.

¶2. (S/NF) The issue at the heart of the discussion was that Mexico must continue to improve its coordination and response capacity among its own security forces to act effectively on intelligence leads regardless of the source, including Mexico's own internal intelligence channels. Mexico's Federal Police still largely bases its operational capacity in Mexico City. The Secretary of Defense (SEDENA) is more decentralized, but has yet to define a cooperative platform to work with the Federal Police. When operations are undertaken in rural areas with difficult terrain, the complexity of moving large security operations in a short time frame may often result in targeted individuals escaping from these operations. Calderon said this situation made him "very sad," and that it was a "great mistake" on their part. Further, Calderon indicated that he would assess the possibility of creating a joint strike force capability. (Note: In separate subsequent meetings, a discussion was launched with GOM officials on the possibility of undertaking a simulated exercise that would begin to test how multiple agencies could cooperate together (septel). End note.)

¶3. (S/NF) Blair underscored that the fight against crime has to move beyond high-value targets. "Cut the head off this snake and new heads will grow." Blair said the key ingredient to success is generating community confidence to call in tips against drug traffickers. To get that, people need to feel secure -- they have to believe that the police can maintain public safety. And it also means that intelligence has to be used quickly, effectively, and responsibly. Intelligence, operations, and institutional capacity have to be interwoven. Calderon agreed. He responded, "You made it very clear. Without attacking the

body as well, we can't win. And we have to create the capacity to take on the body."

¶4. (S/NF) DNI Blair asked Calderon for his perspective on political developments in the region and how the United States could continue to increase its diplomatic effectiveness. Calderon emphasized that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is active everywhere, including Mexico. He went out of his way to highlight that he believes Chavez funded the PRD opposition during the Presidential campaign nearly four years ago. Chavez uses social programs, including sending doctors, to curry political influence, and there are governors in Mexico who may be friendly to him. Calderon said that Mexico is trying to isolate Venezuela through the Rio Group. Calderon also commented that he is particularly concerned about Venezuela's relations with Iran, and that the Iranian Embassy in Mexico is very active. Calderon underscored that Iran's growing influence in Latin American should be of considerable concern to the United States, and Chavez is doing all he can to aid and abet it.

¶5. (S/NF) Calderon exhorted the U.S. to watch Guatemala and Belize, since their internal weaknesses make them vulnerable. He is concerned about Mexico's southern border, and said the GOM is starting a strategic planning process to better treat the topic. (Note: Calderon is scheduled to visit Guatemala next week. End note.) Calderon later in the meeting raised the southern border again as an area for U.S.-Mexico cooperation. Ambassador Pascual noted that the U.S. and Mexico were to hold the next day a joint conference on the Guatemala border to combat arms trafficking from the south.

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¶6. (S/NF) Circling back to Venezuela, Calderon said that Chavez has no qualms about involving himself in Latin American elections, and that he tried to do so in Mexico's own 2006 presidential contest. The region needs a visible U.S. presence, he noted. Chavez, said Calderon, will also have the opportunity to do so in a number of upcoming votes, especially Honduras. Most importantly, said Calderon, the United States must be ready to engage the next Brazilian president. Brazil, he said, is key to restraining Chavez, but he lamented that President Lula has been reluctant to do so. The U.S. needs to engage Brazil more and influence its outlook. In closing, Calderon said that there is a link among Iran, Venezuela, drugs, narcotics trafficking, and rule of law issues. The U.S. should look at Latin America from an interconnected perspective.

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